

# **"Things must be bad at the front"**

## **Women in the Soviet Military during WWII<sup>1</sup>**

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**Abstract:** A number of claims have been advanced about the enlistment of some 900,000 women in the Red Army during WWII—that it resulted from the Communist commitment to gender equality; that voluntary service proves that the population supported the Stalinist regime; that the Soviet state was able to harness effectively its human and material resources; and finally that female service in combat units was both commonplace and a decisive factor in the war. In fact, far from being a well-executed policy, Soviet mobilization of women was hesitant, muddled, inefficient, and cruel. In other words, it reflected the many endemic social and governmental ills of the Stalinist state. If the experience of the wartime Red Army has any utility for debates elsewhere concerning women in the Armed Services, it is largely as a cautionary example.

**Keywords:** women in the military, women soldiers in the USSR, World War II, WWII and memory, male-female relations in the Soviet military, Soviet soldiers' motivation, role of women in Soviet victory

**F**our decades after the Second World War, a female veteran who was inducted into the Red Army in 1942 recalled her somber departure from her village. By all accounts, morale among supporters of the Soviet war ef-

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fort was at a low ebb at that time. During the months following the Axis attack on 22 June 1941, the invaders inflicted millions of casualties, very nearly capturing Moscow, only to be halted by a combination of overextension, exhaustion, weather, and of course determined Soviet resistance. Many hoped that Hitler had been stopped for good, but in June 1942, the *Wehrmacht* resumed its advance. Axis forces broke through Red Army defenses in the south and began their drive toward Stalingrad and the crucial Soviet oilfields of the Caucasus. At the same time, German forces in North Africa threatened to breach British defenses; and in the Indian Ocean, the Japanese Imperial Navy menaced sea communications. The fate of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) once again hung in the balance.

This young female recruit was one individual in the first great wave of women swept into the Soviet armed forces amid the national emergency. She described the grim mood among her fellow villagers: "Those of us who were leaving and those seeing us off were all in tears, but our mothers cried most of all. The men shook their heads in dissatisfaction, though, and repeated: 'Things must be bad at the front if they've started to call up women'."<sup>2</sup>

The USSR's induction of women into the Armed Services during the Second World War was the largest program of its kind, then or since.<sup>3</sup> Some 900,000 Soviet women entered the wartime armed forces, with about 580,000 serving in the Red Army.<sup>4</sup> An estimated 120,000 experienced action, though most were not in combat units.<sup>5</sup> Russia had prior experience of women serving in action. A small contingent of women's units fought in the First World War, most famously the so-called "Women's Battalion of Death," under the formidable Mariia Bochkareva, who met and impressed Woodrow Wilson.<sup>6</sup> During the Russian Civil War of 1917–21, women constituted 2 percent of the Red Army's soldiers.<sup>7</sup> But the Soviets' mass employment of women in the Armed Services during 1941–45 vastly exceeded these precedents.

The subject of women in the Soviet military is of obvious historical significance, and as the largest mobilization of its kind, it is also germane to contemporary debates about women's roles in the Armed Services, especially in combat. Unfortunately, historical evaluation of the subject has often been marred by myths and generalizations based on preconceptions about the USSR and Communism, ignorance of Stalinist reality, a certain romanticism and exoticism that too often suffuses the study of Russia and the eastern front, and by anecdotes and selective numbers divorced from context.

Historians and journalists have advanced a number of claims about women in the wartime Soviet military that have shaped popular perceptions of the Nazi-Soviet war. The readiness of the Soviet leadership to deploy women on a large scale is often ascribed to the Communist regime's ideological commitment to gender equality.<sup>8</sup> The voluntary service of hundreds of thousands of women

has been cited as indicative of the wider population's support for the war effort and even for the Stalinist regime. The argument is often made that the Kremlin prepared from the very outset of hostilities for a protracted conflict, unlike the Nazis, who expected a swift victory.<sup>9</sup> Female mobilization is also sometimes cited as proof that the authoritarian wartime Soviet state was able to harness effectively its human and materiel resources—whatever the Communist system's many peacetime failings.<sup>10</sup> Finally, a number of popular histories and documentaries convey the impression that female service in combat units was both commonplace and a decisive factor in the war. In fact, few of these conventional assumptions hold up under close scrutiny. Far from being a well-executed policy, Soviet mobilization of women into the armed forces was hesitant, muddled, inefficient, and cruel; in other words, it reflected the many endemic social and governmental ills of the Stalinist state.

Six days before the invasion of the USSR, Nazi minister of propaganda Joseph Goebbels met with Adolf Hitler, who confidently predicted a swift triumph. "Bolshevism will collapse like a house of cards," Goebbels wrote. "We face victories unequalled in human history."<sup>11</sup> The massive human and materiel losses that the USSR suffered during the first four months of war seemed to vindicate the Nazis' initial optimism. On 22 June 1941, the Red Army numbered 5.4 million men, some 2.9 million of whom were deployed along the western frontier facing the invaders. According to German records, by December 1941, 3.3 million Soviet soldiers were prisoners of war (POWs).<sup>12</sup> The total number of killed, wounded, and missing by year's end reached 4,308,094, or almost 80 percent of the prewar army.<sup>13</sup> At the peak of their advance, during the summer of 1942, the invaders occupied only 8.7 percent of the USSR's enormous landmass.<sup>14</sup> Yet, given the heavy concentration of Soviet population and economic development in the west of the country, by November 1941, Axis forces had seized regions that supplied 38 percent of prewar Soviet gross grain production; 63 percent of coal; 68 percent of cast iron; 60 percent of aluminum; and 58 percent of all steel furnaces.<sup>15</sup> Less than 40 percent of Soviet civilians underwent enemy occupation, and at least 12 million civilians became refugees.<sup>16</sup>

When the Soviet order did not implode, and the Red Army defied Hitler's complacent predictions by remaining in the field even after suffering monumental losses, the German high command cast about for explanations. Following a Führer conference in August 1942, Chief of the German General Staff Franz Halder suggested in his diary: "Sources. Higher use of women (Russia, 60 percent, Germany, 41 percent)."<sup>17</sup> Halder was apparently referring to Soviet women in the industrial workforce, not to those serving in the armed forces. Yet, even as he wrote these words, the USSR was undertaking a mass mobilization of women, both in the rear and at the front, that would exceed his estimates.

The Soviet leadership did not order the large-scale induction of women into the military until almost a year after the war began, indicating an initial unpreparedness or reluctance on their part. Given that the highly centralized Stalinist state aspired to impose a uniform Communist Party line in all major aspects of Soviet life, it was ironic that, before the war, the Kremlin issued mixed messages concerning gender relations. To be sure, the 1936 Soviet Constitution guaranteed women “equal rights with men in all spheres of economic, state, cultural, social and political life,” but the same document also in theory proclaimed freedom of speech and assembly.<sup>18</sup> The Soviet regime eliminated formal barriers against women’s entry into professions that had either been closed or restricted under the tsarist regime, and equal pay for identical work was the norm throughout Soviet society—the army included.<sup>19</sup> The regime actively encouraged young women to enter the workforce, in part, because the state needed female labor; the violence of the previous decades had created an 11 percent deficit of males in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.<sup>20</sup> As for military training, from 1932 onward, many youths of both sexes aged 12 and older received some formal instruction, including in the use of firearms; thousands learned to fly gliders in aerial clubs. Both boys and girls in the *Komsomol* (All-Union Leninist Communist League of Youth) were more likely to receive such training, because the regime viewed them as the leading stratum of the future generation.<sup>21</sup> According to Soviet-era statistics, 220,000 young girls received at least some basic sharpshooting training before the war.<sup>22</sup> By contrast, both Nazi Germany and democratic Britain forbade female participation in combat and specifically prohibited women from discharging firearms—thus, even preventing them from firing antiaircraft artillery in civil defense.<sup>23</sup> The USSR had no such prohibitions.

That said, however, women were almost entirely absent from the higher ranks of the Communist Party, government, and armed forces, and they rarely occupied high-level civilian managerial positions.<sup>24</sup> Official promises of daycare were seldom honored, and few facilities existed to care for the elderly or chronically ill.<sup>25</sup> With reliable birth control scarce, and abortion made a criminal offense in 1936, the USSR had a high birth rate, equivalent to modern developing nations. In 1939, the crude birthrate in the second-largest Soviet republic, Ukraine—the chief target of the German invaders—was 35.5; in urban areas, it was 33.2.<sup>26</sup> Millions of Soviet mothers did not work outside the home owing to family-care obligations.

The prewar image of the ideal Soviet woman was bifurcated: on the one hand, the state expected her to be an educated, modern member of the workforce; on the other, Communist authorities also expected fecund motherhood, and both the regime and society regarded caregiving as a largely female duty.<sup>27</sup> Communist notions of gender equality also did not sink deep roots in the

non-Slavic areas of the Soviet empire, where locals often resisted it as an alien Russian imposition.<sup>28</sup> Despite the state's formal commitment to gender equality and the military training of adolescent girls, only approximately 1,000 women were serving in the army in June 1941, fewer than in either Nazi Germany or the United Kingdom.<sup>29</sup> None served in combat units. This was the case despite the massive expansion of the Red Army between the outbreak of European war in September 1939 and the Nazi attack in June 1941. Perhaps the absence of women in decision-making positions caused Kremlin planners to overlook the potential for mobilization of women.

When war broke out, thousands of young women appeared at army recruiting stations (*voenkomaty*) seeking to volunteer. Most recruiting officers told these women to return home and await a state summons; some even responded insultingly. Mira Vaiman, for example, was a medical student in Voronezh whose father was Jewish. When she appeared at her local *voenkomat*, the recruiting officer replied with an anti-Semitic slur: "the *voenkom* sarcastically said: 'What do you think? They can't do without your snub nose at the front?'"<sup>30</sup> In the absence of central directives, the whim of the local recruiting officer determined whether a woman was inducted or not. Although a small number of women entered Red Army ranks at this time, the remainder of those not told to return home and wait were instead shunted into two formations: the so-called "destroyer battalions" (*istrebitel'nye battal'ony*) or the people's militia (*narodnoe opol'chenie*).

The destroyer battalions were created following Joseph Stalin's first wartime radio address of 3 July. In his words, they were formed to "fight against all disorganizers of the rear, deserters, panic-mongers, spreaders of rumors . . . [to] exterminate spies, diversionists and enemy parachutists."<sup>31</sup> By the end of July, Moscow had created 1,755 such units with a strength of 328,000.<sup>32</sup> Thousands of women served alongside men in these battalions, some conducting interrogations of enemy prisoners and even committing summary executions. One veteran, Zinaida Pytkina, recounted how she was ordered to "sort out" a German major after interrogation: "My hand didn't tremble when I killed him," she later told the BBC.<sup>33</sup> In April 1943, the destroyer battalions were incorporated into the fearsome SMERSH (*smert' shpionam*, or "death to spies"), which served secret-police functions on a larger scale as the Red Army recovered formerly German-occupied territory before rolling into East and Central Europe.<sup>34</sup>

The "people's militia" was an uncharacteristically romantic throwback to the Russian Civil War of Stalin's youth, as well as to the 1812 war against Napoleon, when armed bands of irregulars harassed the retreating French.<sup>35</sup> In the Soviet incarnation, Moscow formed untrained and ill-armed detachments, lumping together young female volunteers with men judged to be too old or physically unfit to serve in the regular army. Although most such units were

assigned rearward duties, others were sent directly into action, with predictably tragic consequences. Nina Erdman, who volunteered for the army only to be sidelined into the militia remarked: "What are *opolchentsy* [the people's militia] . . . anyway? They knew nothing, couldn't do anything. None of these old people, who might have served at one time, could do anything. Many didn't know [how] to shoot a rifle." The Germans quickly surrounded her unit, and she only made it back to Soviet lines by good fortune.<sup>36</sup>

The people's militia was a disastrous concept, and in mid-war the authorities eliminated it without fanfare, conveying the remaining recruits into the Red Army. By discouraging all but a small number of women from serving in the regular forces during the first months of the war, the Kremlin squandered the enthusiasm, and in the case of the *opolchenie*, even the lives of those women most inclined initially to support the regime and the war effort.

This wave of female voluntarism has been cited as proof that popular support for the war, and even for the Stalinist regime, was the norm in the USSR. One historian writes: "Convinced that their cause was a just one, Soviets entered World War II much as West Europeans had entered World War I—their patriotism firm, their faith in victory strong, their willingness to fight and die untroubled by the doubts about warfare that had circulated so widely in the West."<sup>37</sup> In fact, nobody—neither officials of the Stalinist regime nor historians—could possibly assess overall Soviet public opinion with any certitude. The women who volunteered during the summer of 1941 tended to be urban and beneficiaries of the educational and employment opportunities offered by the Communist state.<sup>38</sup> Being literate, and having served on the winning side, many also bequeathed their accounts to posterity. A disproportionate number were also ethnic-majority Russians or Jews, the latter being the most literate, urbanized national group in the USSR and understandably the segment most wedded to the anti-Nazi cause.<sup>39</sup> To be sure, some women from minority nationalities volunteered, and Soviet propaganda magnified their exploits precisely because they were so few in number.<sup>40</sup>

Although many women volunteered for the cause, opposition to the Stalinist regime, evasion of wartime service, and even outright collaboration with the enemy were also common.<sup>41</sup> The Kremlin was aware that hundreds of thousands of their subjects welcomed the invaders in the Baltic republics (Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania), Bessarabia, and Ukraine.<sup>42</sup> To Moscow's alarm, non-Russian Red Army soldiers also were proportionally more inclined than their Russian or Jewish counterparts to desert.<sup>43</sup> In a handful of alleged instances, ethnic-German Soviet citizens sniped at retreating Red Army soldiers, provoking Stalin's wrath, who in retaliation ordered the deportation to the east of 1.2 million Soviet-Germans, which included men, women, the elderly, and children.<sup>44</sup>

The scale of collaboration in the western borderlands is undeniable, but

some historians contend that the phenomenon was largely limited to areas that were either majority non-Russian, or were only incorporated into the USSR between 1939 and 1941.<sup>45</sup> Once again, the evidence suggests caution: even in the Russian-majority Orlov region, for instance, when draft notices were sent to 110,000 men in the summer of 1941, only 45,000 turned up to the *voenkomaty*.<sup>46</sup>

In 1941, the USSR was a vast, diverse, and still a majority-peasant country; the view from Moscow and the other major cities did not penetrate the hinterland very deeply. Yet historians' sources are almost exclusively of urban origin. Rural Soviets were often suspicious of urban Soviet citizens, and resentment against the murderous collectivization of the farms less than a decade earlier remained rife.<sup>47</sup> Contemporary urban Soviet citizens were often mystified by their rural fellow citizens. When Muscovite Nikolai Obryn'ba found himself cut off behind German lines, he expected help from locals, only to find that some were "actually looking forward to the Fritzes!"<sup>48</sup> Likewise, war correspondent Vasily Grossman encountered female peasants who hoped that the invaders would dissolve the collective farms and reopen churches closed by the atheist Communist regime.<sup>49</sup>

In short, it is misleading to generalize about popular opinion throughout the USSR based on the stated motives of Red Army women. Most female servicemembers were volunteers and constituted a self-selected group that was by definition more committed to the war effort and more supportive of the regime than the population as a whole. This does not render their views insignificant, but they were not a representative cross section of the population.

On 2 October 1941, the *Wehrmacht* launched what Hitler expected to be the final assault on Moscow. By 16 October, when it appeared that the attackers could not be stopped, panic, rioting, and looting swept the capital, lasting for several days before order was restored. Stalin commanded the evacuation of government ministries and defense plants.<sup>50</sup> Half of the city's population fled.<sup>51</sup> Soviet power appeared to hang in thin air. Amid this crisis, on 8 October 1941, the GKO (*Gosudarstvennyi Komitet Oborony*, or State Committee of Defense) ordered the creation of three new aerial regiments, to be staffed entirely by female aviators and ground crew.<sup>52</sup> These were to be the USSR's first entirely female combat units.

For most, 8 October was a surpassingly strange time to create such formations. On that very day, the GKO ordered the evacuation of aircraft plants from Moscow, Rostov, and Voronezh to escape the advancing enemy.<sup>53</sup> Rather than forming women's infantry detachments to defend the capital, the Kremlin opted instead to invest in air squadrons that would require at least six months to equip and train. One account suggests that the decision resulted from the persistent efforts of Marina Raskova, a prewar air pioneer and heroine. Raskova



pressed the authorities to harness the skills of women who had learned to fly before the war, and she was backed by a letter-writing campaign from many women eager to serve.<sup>54</sup> If she had any wartime influence with Stalin, however, she probably exerted it via a third party, because the dictator's wartime appointments diary does not indicate that he met her during the months before the October decision.<sup>55</sup> A recent history argues that the initiative came instead from the *Komsomol* leadership and that Raskova's advocacy only helped.<sup>56</sup> Whatever the reason, the choice to form air squadrons, rather than ground units, circumvented the principal concern commonly voiced by those opposed to putting women into combat: that doing so would undermine morale and unit cohesion. Segregation of women in their own units on air bases, rather than sending them into the frontline alongside men, harnessed women's skills while minimizing the intermingling of the sexes.

These three units have been studied more thoroughly than any other female formations. Totalling roughly 300 fliers, one group piloted modern Yakovlev Yak-9 fighters; a second, light bombers; and the third flew obsolete two-seater biplanes constructed of canvas and wood.<sup>57</sup> This latter group gained notoriety during the Battle of Stalingrad, when the Germans dubbed them *Die Nachthexen* (the Nightwitches).<sup>58</sup> The fighter squadron produced the world's first female air ace; Lidiia (or Lilia) Litviak, who was not only the first Soviet female fighter pilot to down an enemy plane but also became the highest-scoring female flier of any nationality, eventually compiling a total of 12 confirmed solo kills before she herself disappeared over German-held territory in 1943.<sup>59</sup>

The experiment of female-staffed air units never spread; instead, two of the three groups were eventually diluted by adding more male members. This may have been in reaction to Raskova's death in a crash on 4 January 1943, which eliminated her energetic advocacy. Curiously, Moscow never made significant mention of these female fliers in their otherwise extensive propaganda.<sup>60</sup> According to the recollections of one female veteran, Stalin hinted at the reason when he allegedly told Raskova: "You understand, future generations will not forgive us for sacrificing young girls."<sup>61</sup> Of course, Stalin had already sacrificed countless young girls; but fostering popular emotional connections with individual heroines risked undermining, rather than bolstering, public morale if these airwomen were to be killed in action. Highlighting the exploits of female fliers in Soviet propaganda also threatened the masculine ethos of "Stalin's falcons," as male fighter pilots were dubbed by the press.

The creation of the women's air squadrons in October did not portend an immediate spike in female recruitment. As late as January 1942, fewer women were serving in the Red Army than in either the British or German armed forces.<sup>62</sup> The Kremlin leadership was not yet convinced that it required large numbers of female soldiers. When the Red Army halted the *Wehrmacht* be-



fore Moscow in December, then drove it back along several large sectors of the front, Stalin seems to have become convinced that, as with Napoleon's Grande Armée of 1812, the *Wehrmacht* was a spent force on the verge of disintegration. He spurred his generals to press the enemy unceasingly, heedless of losses, in hopes of turning retreat into rout.<sup>63</sup> In December 1941, the dictator boasted to Britain's visiting foreign minister that "the German Army is not so strong after all," even suggesting that the USSR might be prepared to enter the war against Japan in 1942.<sup>64</sup>

Battered though it was, however, the *Wehrmacht* did not crack. By the spring of 1942, even the most stubbornly optimistic Soviet leaders recognized that the war had become a protracted conflict, demanding the full efforts of every citizen. The Soviet government therefore scoured every corner of society in search of underutilized personnel. Food-ration standards were issued that effectively forced millions of mothers not already working outside the home to choose between entering defense plants or watching their families starve.<sup>65</sup> The regime sent tens of thousands of children aged 12 and older into war industries under the guise of training schemes, that were "in reality . . . merciless exploitation."<sup>66</sup> The NKVD (*Narodnyi kommissariat vnutrennykh del*, or People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) strictly enforced labor-discipline laws enacted in 1940, punishing absenteeism or changing jobs without permission.<sup>67</sup> Moscow announced a series of amnesties, applying only to ordinary criminals, not political prisoners; by war's end more than 1 million former Gulag convicts had entered the army.<sup>68</sup> On 3 April, the GKO ordered the NKVD to transfer 500,000 "suitable" prisoners from labor colonies to frontline construction gangs.<sup>69</sup> Work-capable ethnic Germans, whom Stalin had ordered deported during the previous autumn, were now driven into compulsory *trudarmii* (labor armies), or forced labor.<sup>70</sup>

The Soviet government began inducting women into the armed forces on a mass scale amid this dire national emergency of 1942, not in response to a spontaneous upsurge of patriotic enthusiasm, or owing to any lingering commitment to gender equality. Beginning in March, Moscow issued a flurry of orders and decrees designed to replace every male soldier not directly engaged at the front with women, even adolescent girls, freeing every male soldier previously detailed to logistical and support roles. On 26 March, the People's Commissariat of Defense (NKO) issued order no. 0058, directing 100,000 *Komsomol* girls to replace men as antiaircraft personnel.<sup>71</sup> A decree on 13 April ordered that, within one month, 5,856 women replace male soldiers in all forms of army communications—from radio to telephone and telegraph, even the postal service.<sup>72</sup> The next day, the NKO decreed that women draftees replace men in all military secretarial positions.<sup>73</sup> Four days later, Moscow ordered female soldiers to replace all riflemen guarding rear positions and for-

tifications.<sup>74</sup> Further decrees followed, ordering women to supplant men in all noncombat roles, which included the navy, merchant marine, truck transport, delivery of newly manufactured tanks to depots or the front, and, where possible, in all army medical Services. In these instances, some of the women and girls who were *Komsomol* members were not volunteers but conscripts. The regime viewed these adolescents as subject to Communist Party discipline and thus to mandatory assignment.

These noncombat positions were, for the most part, well behind the front lines, but Soviet authorities also decided to experiment with a broader female combat role. On 3 November 1942, a women's volunteer rifle brigade was formed, with recruits numbering 6,240.<sup>75</sup> Although many of these women were eager to serve at the front, the Red Army balked. The brigade was instead assigned garrison duties, where recruits suffered from demoralization, a number of sexual assaults, and abiding hunger. Soldiers at the front received full rations, whereas those stationed in the rear received 500 fewer calories per day. Stuck in limbo as the brigade was, desertion increased, with some soldiers even fleeing to the front in hopes of finally seeing action—and of being fed better.<sup>76</sup> Eventually, the unit was broken up into smaller detachments before being dissolved entirely in 1944. This refusal to field an all-female infantry unit was actually a retrograde step from tsarist precedent.

The first group of female frontline soldiers to gain international fame was not this lost brigade but rather the smaller contingent of snipers. The best-known of these was Lyudmila Pavlichenko, who amassed a total of 309 kills. Pavlichenko was one of the few women who had been allowed to enter the army in the summer of 1941, but in mid-1942 authorities removed her from combat and sent her on a propaganda tour of both the United Kingdom and the United States. President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his wife, Eleanor Roosevelt, hosted her in the White House, and she addressed rallies in several American cities accompanied by the First Lady. In November 1942, the NKO ordered formal training for female snipers, and in March of the following year they established a school for them.<sup>77</sup> By the end of the war, 1,885 women had graduated from seven sniper classes.<sup>78</sup>

As compelling as female snipers' stories were, women made by far their largest contribution to the Soviet military in more customary gender roles when they flooded into the medical corps by the tens of thousands during the last half of 1942. The vast majority were volunteers, with motives ranging from ideological commitment or patriotism, to hatred of the enemy or more personal reasons. Nurse Mariia Lesina explained that "I and thousands of young people (and not them only) were spoiling for the front. Each person had his own motive—revenge for a ruined life, for the death of family and friends, a personal desire to take part in the fight, yes, and the party-political apparatus was not idle.

. . . ‘Everything for the front, everything for victory!’ was no empty phrase.”<sup>79</sup> Forty-one percent of the 200,000 medical doctors who served in the Red Army during the war were women. Working with the Red Cross, more than 300,000 women trained as nurses and another 500,000 as less-skilled medics.<sup>80</sup> Some of these medics were sent to the front after receiving only six weeks of medical training.<sup>81</sup> Soviet-era sources claim that 100 percent of wartime nurses were women.<sup>82</sup> During the war, Red Army medical staff treated more than 22 million patients; 90 percent of sick soldiers and 72 percent of wounded returned to the front, many after having been wounded multiple times.<sup>83</sup>

Before the autumn of 1942, the relatively small numbers of snipers and airwomen made it possible to segregate them somewhat from male soldiers; the same held true, at least in theory, for logistical and rearward services. The mass influx of women into command staff, and especially into medical units, during 1942–43, however, rendered separation impossible. Nor did the distinction between the fighting front and rearward services long survive contact with battlefield reality. As American forces in conflicts such as those in Afghanistan and Iraq later discovered, modern warfare erases bright lines between combat and support units.

Although most female medical personnel served in facilities situated well to the rear, many staffed frontline aid stations. One wounded soldier was surprised to encounter a nurse so close to the fighting. “The nurse smiled at my alarm,” he recalled. “ ‘Don’t worry, soldier, during battles we always deploy the medical stations as close as possible to the front. For the wounded, especially the severely wounded, even an extra minute, not to mention an extra hour or day, can be critical to his survival’ .”<sup>84</sup> Not only did this forward positioning risk injury or death from hostile fire but forward-based hospitals also were overrun at times by the enemy. During the Battle of Stalingrad, for instance, where the defenders of the city were pinned with their backs against the Volga River for more than four months, all Soviet personnel in the city were without exception at the frontline, regardless of whether they were in designated combat units. Among female nursing staff, the casualty rate in that battle was by all accounts horrific.<sup>85</sup>

Female medics could be assigned to combat units; many of the estimated 120,000 female soldiers who experienced fighting did so under such circumstances. Artilleryman Isaak Kobylanskiy remembered that “most medical orderlies in such platoons were older men, but sometimes a girl served there.”<sup>86</sup> The death rate among infantry and armored units on the eastern front was frightful, far higher than in the western theater, and female medics who had to retrieve wounded soldiers from between the battle lines were often even more exposed than ordinary soldiers. Lesina recalled: “It was extremely difficult work to crawl under fire and then drag back the badly wounded, also under fire.”<sup>87</sup>

Another female veteran told an interviewer: "In tank units medical orderlies didn't last long. There was no place in a tank for us. We clung to the armour and thought about one thing only: how to keep our feet clear of the caterpillars so we wouldn't get dragged in. . . . There were five of us, five friends at the front. . . . And they were all killed, except me."<sup>88</sup>

Aside from the threat of death or mutilation at the front, female soldiers most feared being captured by the enemy. The Germans routinely treated Soviet POWs barbarically, but in several instances German commanders issued explicit orders to mistreat female captives.<sup>89</sup> A nurse described the widely shared terror: "One of our nurses was taken prisoner. About a day later we liberated the village and found her—her eyes had been put out, her breasts lopped off. She had been impaled. . . . She was a young girl of nineteen. . . . [W]e would rather die than be taken prisoner. . . . Nothing else was that frightening."<sup>90</sup>

Women remained a minority in the frontline zone. A sympathetic male veteran recalled that "the life and fate of most women [in the army] were [*sic*] very hard," because women shared all the dangers and physical hardships of frontline life with the added burdens of everyday indignities and sexual vulnerability from both sides of the conflict.<sup>91</sup> Galina Khokhlova recalls that "it was uncomfortable to be among men all the time. One was always surrounded by guys."<sup>92</sup> The presence of women at the front transformed social relations. Many male soldiers were protective, even if sometimes patronizingly so, referring to their female comrades as *sestrënki*, or "little sisters," doing what they could to protect them. Natalia Peshkova, a medic, claims "I should say that I have a very high opinion of the men. They never cursed when I was near."<sup>93</sup>

Nonetheless, a wide variety of abuses flourished. Absent any social consensus about women's roles, Soviet commanders' attitudes toward female recruits ranged from supportive, to hostile, to outright exploitative. Sexual abuse was not a monopoly of the Soviet armed forces. Necessarily authoritarian and generally male-dominated command structures, pervasive violence, and a masculine warrior ethos provide fertile conditions for outrages in other militaries; but the specific circumstances of the Stalinist forces magnified these problems. During the preceding decades, Soviet society was extraordinarily violent. The totalitarian state promoted an ethic of collectivism and obedience, not individualism or critical thinking. Red Army discipline was draconian: during the war, military tribunals convicted 994,000 Red Army soldiers of cowardice, desertion, and unauthorized retreat; 157,593 were sentenced to death, some for "crimes" no more serious than grumbling about food and living conditions.<sup>94</sup> In such circumstances, male and female recruits were reluctant to complain about their officers' misbehavior, let alone that of the omnipresent political police. "We were more afraid of the special police agents than we were of the Germans," a female veteran explained. "Even the Generals were afraid of them."<sup>95</sup>

Soviet society lacked independent courts, a free press, or civil institutions to which an aggrieved soldier might appeal. Adding to these factors, in August 1941, Stalin ordered frontline troops to be supplied with 100 grams of vodka per day, or 3.38 fluid ounces.<sup>96</sup> Prolonged battlefield stress and high casualties; a patriarchal culture; authoritarian, unaccountable, and violent institutions; the easy availability of weaponry and strong drink; and the intermingling of the sexes in circumstances where peacetime social restraints were weakened—was a toxic brew.

Flaunting their authority, many officers soon adopted mistresses. Jealous recruits gave such women a derisory name: *pokhodno-polevye zheny* (roughly, “campaign field wives”). Shortened to PPZh, this acronym was a play on the name of the infantry’s submachine gun, the PPSH-41. Lev Kopelev, a veteran and later dissident, recounted that “some generals quickly came to regard all nurses, waitresses and women typists and radio operators as fair game.”<sup>97</sup> Another soldier explained: “Most division and higher commanders had an enormous entourage . . . [including] without fail a harem or a PPZh.”<sup>98</sup> One regimental commander ordered a subordinate to “report . . . upon the arrival of any new woman, especially on her appearance and sexual appeal” before he would assign her a position.<sup>99</sup> Most female volunteers did not, of course, become PPZh, and many disparaged those who did. One female veteran remarked disdainfully: “We didn’t like them at all.”<sup>100</sup> Women who spurned the attentions of predatory officers, however, might find themselves sent to the guardhouse or assigned to hazardous duty.<sup>101</sup> One memoirist recounts the story of a young nurse whose persistent refusals “cost her very dearly.” Her commander dispatched her to a combat unit in retaliation, where she was soon killed by an artillery shell.<sup>102</sup>

Male/female frontline relationships often generated rivalries and sometimes violence. Lev Kopelev’s commanding officer tried to coerce Kopelev’s girlfriend into a sexual relationship; when she resisted, the officer attempted to get Kopelev arrested as a Trotskyite.<sup>103</sup> Moisei Dorman described how one officer became suspicious that his men were paying undue attention to his mistress and planned murderous revenge. He stuffed their artillery barrel with sod, expecting it to explode and kill the crew. The gunners discovered the sabotage and later exacted their own vengeance, murdering the officer during combat. “In fact, such things happened at the front,” Dorman wrote prosaically.<sup>104</sup>

With sex common and contraceptives few, pregnancies inevitably resulted.<sup>105</sup> Ol’ga Pivovarova recalls that three women from her village served in the army, “but they all got pregnant and returned from the front.”<sup>106</sup> Although abortion was illegal, many women nonetheless arranged operations. Vera Stepina, who served in a combat construction unit, explained that women “did not do these things openly, people hid them.”<sup>107</sup> This was risky. During the war years, 9,105 doctors and 29,635 women were convicted of performing illegal

abortions and sentenced to eight years in the Gulag; if the fetus was more than four and one-half months old, the charge was elevated to murder.<sup>108</sup> By way of contrast, only 7,363 men were convicted of rape during the same period.<sup>109</sup> This low number of convictions for rape is even more striking in view of the fact that Red Army soldiers notoriously committed this crime on an unprecedented scale as they swept into Eastern Europe and Germany.<sup>110</sup>

Contrary to hardy myth, Red Army women did not play a decisive combat role. This is not to disparage the heroism or skills of female soldiers—it is purely a matter of numbers. The eastern front was vast; a total of 34.4 million Soviet citizens entered the wartime forces.<sup>111</sup> In 7 of the 16 quarter-years of the war, the number of Soviet soldiers killed and missing exceeded the total sum of the 580,000 women who served in the army.<sup>112</sup> Nor were women as intensively mobilized as many segments of the population. From a prewar community of just over 3 million, for example, approximately 500,000 Jewish men served in the ranks of the armed forces, with 216,000 perishing in combat or as a result of wounds.<sup>113</sup> A small fraction of Red Army women served in dedicated combat units. According to two scholars, “only about 2,500 women . . . actually stormed the ultimate military bastion: military combat on the frontline.”<sup>114</sup>

Soviet employment of women both in the army and the rear was cruel and wasteful. In every year of the war, more women languished in the Gulag, by a substantial margin, than served in Red Army ranks. Most were civilians convicted under excessively harsh labor statutes, though some female soldiers were also imprisoned for various infractions. In August 1945, the Gulag held 547,753 female prisoners—almost equal to the number of women who served in the army throughout the entire war. In 1942, the threat to national survival caused the Kremlin to induct women en masse; but only two years later, in mid-1944, when Soviet victory looked assured, a demographic national crisis loomed owing to the massive wartime loss of life. The Kremlin accordingly jammed gender policies into reverse gear: in March, the women’s rifle battalion was disbanded; thousands of women were returned quietly from the front; and on 8 July, a new law on marriage and the family was promulgated, making divorce harder, single motherhood more onerous, and effectively restoring the stigma of “illegitimate” birth.<sup>115</sup> Medals and monetary awards were established for “Hero Mothers,” urging women to bear multiple children. Soviet statisticians pored over birth, abortion, and marriage statistics, searching for ways to increase baby output, much as they would to accelerate annual hog production.<sup>116</sup>

When the war ended, many female veterans were understandably proud of the part they played in defeating Nazism. Women’s role in combat may have been marginal, but this was certainly not true of the medical and support services, where female doctors and nurses saved tens of thousands of lives and lo-

gistical personnel helped to sustain the Red Army's drive on Berlin. The number of women in the armed forces before 1943 was too small to have any major effect during the battles of Moscow and Stalingrad, which are generally regarded as the turning points on the Eastern Front; but the subsequent recovery of occupied Soviet territory and the drive into the heart of Europe owed a good deal to female personnel. The war irrevocably altered employment patterns as well: hitherto largely male professions, such as accounting and medicine, became, and remained, largely female realms.<sup>117</sup> Unlike in the postwar United States, where many women who had been employed during wartime were released to make way for returning male veterans, this did not happen in the USSR. As with female employment before the war, this owed less to the regime's commitment to gender equality than it did to a need for their labor. The Red Army suffered 8,668,400 deaths during the war; although no precise breakdown by gender has emerged, it has been claimed that more than 192,458 of these were women.<sup>118</sup> This lost generation of men would never return to resume their civilian jobs; the state expected women to fill the void while simultaneously producing millions of babies to replace wartime losses.<sup>119</sup>

The Soviet regime and society more generally did not celebrate female veterans' wartime achievements; indeed, during the first postwar years the state seemed eager to erase the record of women's service almost as though it were a national embarrassment. The Stalinist leadership had a largely instrumental view of women, as it did for all its citizens: they were a resource to be thrown at national crises as they arose, only to be discarded, or redirected, when their services were no longer required. In a condescending address to demobilizing female soldiers in July 1945, Soviet president Mikhail Kalinin declared: "Allow me, as one grown wise with years, to say to you: do not give yourself airs in your future practical work. Do not talk about the services you rendered, let others do it for you. That will be better."<sup>120</sup> Others did not in fact do this for decades afterward; when female veterans were finally able to speak their minds freely, as the Communist regime disintegrated and then collapsed, many complained that their achievements had been written out of official history and that during the early postwar years many of their fellow citizens actually held their service against them. The state shared responsibility for this. When Lieutenant General Pavel Shafarenko published his memoirs in the 1970s, a questioner asked why he had written so little about the women who had served under his command during the war. His reply lifted the veil on official policy: "I wrote about the twenty-two women who served in the division, but the deputy head of the war memoirs department of the publishing house in Moscow crossed out twenty-one of the women, saying, 'Do you want young people thinking that our war was won by women?'"<sup>121</sup>



Whereas Red Army men, including many who had taken part in mass rapes in Central Europe, were lionized as the saviors of the USSR and of civilization itself, returning female soldiers were often stigmatized as women of dubious morals who had volunteered for the army in search of male companionship.

Six decades after the end of the war, an interviewer asked Nina Afanas'evna how the public treated returning female veterans, and her response was typical: "Badly," she replied. "From strangers one could hear: '*Frontovaia*' or '*frontovichka*.' This continued for five years after the war. Many did not talk about the fact that they had fought, they were ashamed. I was never afraid, and I was never ashamed."<sup>122</sup> With a huge postwar deficit of males, parents often discouraged their sons from marrying female veterans, whom they treated as damaged goods. Senior Sargent Nina Ilyinskaya remarked: "A man returned and there he was, a hero. An eligible young man! But if it was a girl, then immediately people looked askance: 'We know what you did there! . . .' And the whole of the suitor's family would think: should he marry her? To tell the truth, we concealed the fact that we had been at the front, we did not want to tell people about it. We wanted to become ordinary girls again. Marriageable girls."<sup>123</sup> Unmarried female soldiers who had become pregnant faced even greater social stigma and, owing to the new family law, found it almost impossible to establish paternity or to receive the same state benefits awarded to married mothers.

If the experience of women in the wartime Red Army has any utility for debates elsewhere concerning women in the armed services, it is largely as a cautionary example. When allowed to do so, female soldiers performed well, proving that women could serve in combat and support units; as one female veteran asserted, "we lived honorably, fought honorably."<sup>124</sup> Characteristically, however, the authoritarian, highly centralized Communist state utilized women's talents reluctantly, erratically, and inefficiently. Defenders of the Soviet wartime record claim that mass mobilization of women reflected the progressive gender policies of the USSR and contend that the manifold shortcomings of that mobilization can be explained by the fact that it was conducted under the worst possible circumstances, as the invaders threatened Soviet survival. The first assertion is not borne out by the halting and haphazard history of female mobilization. As for the second claim, the Communist authorities do not merit a pass based on the dire exigencies of 1941–42. The war in Europe raged for almost two years before Barbarossa erupted. During that time, foreseeing the possibility of being drawn into the conflict, the Kremlin ordered a massive expansion of the Red Army, increasing the number of soldiers from 1.5 million men in 1938 to more than 5 million by June 1941, and preparing to field a force of 8.6 million by spring 1942; Moscow also heavily reoriented industry toward military production.<sup>125</sup> Soviet historians, and of much Western historiography as well, have long held that the Soviets used the period of the Nazi-Soviet Pact (August

1939–June 1941) to buy time to prepare for war against Hitler.<sup>126</sup> Yet, even as the threat of war loomed large, when Hitler attacked the USSR, the Red Army lagged well behind both the United Kingdom and Nazi Germany in the military mobilization of its female population, even in support services.<sup>127</sup>

Early wartime steps to harness women's skills were ill-conceived. The misbegotten *opolchenie* units were thankfully soon disbanded. As the Germans threatened Moscow, the Kremlin chose to create costly female air squadrons whose lengthy training prevented them from defending the besieged capital. Once established, however, these air units were not allowed to expand to include the many women who possessed flying skills and were eager to serve; their propaganda value was squandered. The creation, equipment, training—and then subsequent dissolution—of a women's rifle battalion was a case study in bureaucratic waste and even cruelty. Most discredibly, the state discarded female veterans once their services were no longer required, did nothing at all to protect them from widespread social opprobrium based on tales of supposed frontline licentiousness, and even enacted laws that effectively punished women who had become pregnant at the front. Once the war was over, the army reverted to its prewar practices; few women remained in the armed services, and those who did occupied traditionally female supportive roles. The high command remained entirely male.

Although the service of women in logistical and medical roles was indisputably valuable, the mingling of men and women at the front engendered all manner of abuses: sexual exploitation, violence, rivalries, and morale problems—even murder. The widespread availability of alcohol aggravated every ill. Unexpurgated post-Soviet memoirs suggest that outrages were widespread, though the subject requires further, detailed research. Prominent contemporary Russian scholars have neglected the subject, as well as women's wartime roles more generally.<sup>128</sup> Clearly, however, several important elements were absent in the Soviet experience, which foreordained trouble. The USSR lacked any prewar social or governmental consensus that women should serve on par with men. Stalinist political culture was violent, secretive, and designed to foster fear and division; it did little to contain or eradicate abuses, and indeed the unchecked power that officers and security men wielded fostered and protected misbehavior. Despite the regime's hyperbolic rhetoric about gender equality, and despite the many individual soldiers and officers who embraced these concepts, the regime did little to challenge widespread social notions about women's subordinate status, which had deep roots in the patriarchal peasant culture. Most importantly, Soviet society lacked any of the institutions that are common in democracies that together provide some protection against abuse: independent courts, a free press, and nonstate social organizations. The wartime mobilization of Soviet women into the Red Army was the largest ex-

periment of its kind. No advocate of gender equality or of the integration of women into the armed forces should wish to see it celebrated, much less used as a model.

## Notes

1. The important role women played in the partisan war throughout German-occupied regions is not examined here, because this would have both greatly expanded and diluted what must be a brief survey.
2. Svetlana Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1988), 162.
3. During the peak of the war, 272,000 women served in the U.S. military; 470,000 served in the British women's and nursing services, where they constituted a slightly higher proportion of the armed forces (10 percent) than in the Soviet case (8 percent). I. C. B. Dear, ed., *The Oxford Companion to World War II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 1,277 and 1,278; and "By the Numbers: Women in the U.S. Military," CNN, 24 January 2013. Approximately 203,000 women were serving in the American military in 2013.
4. G. F. Krivosheev, "Ob itogakh statisticheskikh issledovaniy poter' Vooruzhennykh Sil SSSR v Velikoi Otechestvennoi voine" [On the sources of statistical research of losses of the armed forces of the USSR in the Great Patriotic War], in *Liudskie poteri SSSR v period vtoroi mirovoi voiny: Sbornik statei* [Human losses of the USSR in the period of the Second World War: collection of essays] (Moscow: Russko-Baltiiskii informatsionnyi tsentr, 1995), 79. Original in Russian. The overall number of women who served in all branches of the armed forces is not certain. Soviet-era figures indicate 800,000. M. M. Kozlov, ed., *Velikaia Otechestvennaia voina, 1941–1945: Entsiklopediia* [The Great Patriotic War, 1941–1945: encyclopedia, hereafter, VOVE] (Moscow: Sovetskaia entsiklopediia, 1985), 270. Original in Russian. A recent historian puts the figure at 900,000. Anna Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat: A History of Violence on the Eastern Front* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 145.
5. Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 10.
6. Laurie S. Stoff, *They Fought for the Motherland: Russia's Women Soldiers in World War I and the Revolution* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006).
7. Susanne Conze and Beate Fieseler, "Soviet Women as Comrades-in-Arms: A Blind Spot in the History of the War," in *The People's War: Responses to World War II in the Soviet Union*, ed. Robert W. Thurston and Bernd Bonwetsch (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 214; and Barbara Evans Clements, *Bolshevik Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 172–80.
8. This is the assumption, with some reservations, underlying the two most recent book-length studies of women in the wartime Soviet military: Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*; Roger D. Markwick and Euridice Charon Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline in the Second World War* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012); and also Barbara Alpern Engel, "The Womanly Face of War: Soviet Women Remember World War II," in *Women and War in the Twentieth Century: Enlisted with or without Consent*, ed. Nicole Ann Dombrowski (New York: Routledge, 1999).
9. David Stahel, *Operation Typhoon: Hitler's March on Moscow, October 1941* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 134. Stahel does not mention women specifically, pointing to superior Soviet tank production as his chief indicator of Soviet preparations for protracted war.
10. In an influential book, Richard Overy offers a common explanation for Soviet wartime economic achievements: "The simple answer might be that the Soviet Union operated a command economy, directed by the state and centrally planned." Richard Overy, *Why the Allies Won* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 183–84; see David Stahel, *Operation Barbarossa and Germany's Defeat in the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 144.

11. Entry for 16 June 1941 in Fred Taylor, ed., *The Goebbels Diaries, 1939–1941* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1983), 414.
12. Soviet sources suggest a lower figure of 2 million POWs. Alexander N. Yakovlev, *A Century of Violence in Soviet Russia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002), 171. Yakovlev provides a breakdown per year of prisoner numbers. The higher German figure is provided by Rolf-Dieter Müller and Gerd R. Ueberschär, *Hitler's War in the East, 1941–1945: A Critical Assessment* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1997), 214. The disparity may be explained by the fact that the Germans counted each prisoner as they were captured, whereas the Soviets often could not determine whether a soldier had gone missing or had been captured and subsequently perished in Nazi custody.
13. David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House, *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1995), table A, 292.
14. “Dannye o territorii i naselenii, podvergavshikhsia vremennoi okkupatsii i osvobodzhennymkh rayonov” [Figures about the territory and population that underwent temporary occupation and liberated regions], in *Sovetskaia povsednevnost' i massovoe soznanie, 1939–1945* [Soviet daily life and mass consciousness, 1939–1945], ed. I. Ia. Livshin and I. B. Orlov (Moscow, 2003), 297. Original in Russian.
15. N. Voznesenskii, *Voennaia ekonomika SSSR v period Otechestvennoi voiny* [The wartime economy of the USSR in the period of the Patriotic War] (Moscow: Ekonomicheskaiia gazeta, 2003), 110–11. Original in Russian.
16. Voznesenskii, *The Wartime Economy of the USSR in the Period of the Patriotic War*, 110. Original in Russian. Estimates of the number of refugees range from a low of 12 million to a high of 20. See William Moskoff, *The Bread of Affliction: The Food Supply in the USSR during WWII* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 30.
17. Entry for 3 August 1942, in Charles Burdick and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, eds., *The Halder War Diary, 1939–1942* (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), 651.
18. “1936 Constitution of the USSR,” Bucknell University.
19. Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, 244–55.
20. Rossiiskaia akademiia nauka [Russian Academy of Sciences], *Vsesoiuznaia perepis' naseleniia 1939 goda: Osnovnye itogi* [All-union census of the population in the year 1939: basic results], hereafter RAN, 21. Original in Russian.
21. Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 51, 57, 99.
22. Kozlov, *VOVE*, 270. Original in Russian.
23. Georgina Natzio, “Homeland Defence: British Gunners, Women and Ethics during the Second World War,” in *Women in War: From Home Front to Front Line*, ed. Celia Lee and Paul Edward Strong (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Military, 2012), 91.
24. Clements, *Bolshevik Women*, 257. Barbara Clements contends that advancement in female leadership during the decade after the Revolution reverted during the 1930s to “the ancient belief that politics was the business of men working in teams.”
25. Barbara Alpern Engel, *Women in Russia, 1700–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 175–76.
26. Riabichko to Korotchenko, 12 August 1946, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum [hereafter, USHMM], RG-31.026, reel 58, fond 1 opis' 23 delo 2536. By way of comparison, this is equivalent to the current crude birthrate in Benin (35.5), the 19th highest rate in the world; the current figure for the United States is 12.5; for Russia, 11.3. “The World Factbook,” CIA, accessed 26 May 2017. The birthrate in Ukraine was roughly the same as in the Russian Federation, though lower than that in Central Asia. Ansley J. Coale, Barbara A. Anderson, and Erna Harm, *Human Fertility in Russia since the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979).
27. Engel, *Women in Russia*, 166–84.
28. Engel, *Women in Russia*, 186–207.
29. Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 117.
30. Interview with Вайман Мира Зелиховна [Mira Zelikhovna Vaiman], IRemember, accessed 17 May 2013.
31. “Vystuplenie po radio, 3 July 1941” [Speech by radio, 3 July 1941], in I. Stalin, *O*

- velikoi Otechestvennoi voine sovetского soiuza* [On the Great Patriotic War of the Soviet Union] (Moscow: Kraft, 2002), 11–16. Original in Russian.
32. Kozlov, VOVE, 478. Original in Russian.
  33. Laurence Rees interview of Zinaida Pytkina, *BBC History Magazine*, October 2007.
  34. GKO resolution no 235, 21 April 1943, *Lubianka Stalin i NKVD-NKGB-GUKP "Smersh," 1939–Mart 1946* [The Lubianka, Stalin and the NKVD-NKGB-GUKP "Smersh," 1939–March 1946], ed. N. V. Khaustov et al. (Moscow, 2006), 372–75.
  35. Dominic Lieven, *Russia against Napoleon: The True Story of the Campaigns of War and Peace* (New York: Penguin Books, 2009), 217–19.
  36. "Nina Erdman," IRemember, accessed 6 June 2013.
  37. Engel, *The Womanly Face of War*, 138.
  38. Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 26. Krylova refers to the group she has studied as "highly educated."
  39. RAN, 57, 83. At the time, 86.9 percent of Russian Jews lived in cities, and their literacy rate was 85 percent; the comparative figures for the largest Soviet ethnic group, Russians, were 37.8 percent and 58 percent.
  40. Kazimiera J. Cottam, *Women in War and Resistance: Selected Biographies of Soviet Women Soldiers* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing/R. Pullins, 1998), 176–79. See the case of Mansiia (Manshuk) Mametova.
  41. See, for example, Martin Dean, *Collaboration in the Holocaust: Crimes of the Local Police in Belorussia and Ukraine, 1941–1944* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).
  42. "Razvedsvodka," Ts KP/b/U, 19 September 1942, USHMM, RG-31.026, reel 7, fond 1 opis' 23 delo 115. A lengthy report to Nikita Khrushchev, Communist Party boss of Ukraine, provided ample detail about collaboration in that republic during the first year of the war.
  43. Leonov, "Spravka o faktakh izmeny rodine v chastiakh deistvuiashchei Krasnoi Army," [Information regarding facts of betrayal of the motherland in units of the active Red Army] 15 July 1942, RtsKhIDNI, R 1358 fond 5 opis' 6 ekh. 85. Original in Russian. A report to Moscow from the spring of 1942 broke down the numbers of desertions in forces operating in the south, demonstrating that members of minority nationalities, as well as those with families behind German lines, were less reliable.
  44. Tiulenev, Zaporozhets, and Romanov to Stalin and Budënniy, 1 August 1941, in *Stalinskie deportatsii, 1928–1953* [Stalinist deportations, 1928–1953], ed. N. L. Pobol' and P. M. Pol'ian, Rossiia XX vek: Dokumenty [Russia of the xxth century: documents] (Moscow, 2005), 323. Original in Russian.
  45. Robert W. Thurston, *Life and Terror in Stalin's Russia, 1934–1941* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 216ff.
  46. Ponomarenko to Stalin, 19 August 1941, " 'Tol'ko avtoritetnyi komandir smozhet zastavit' preodelet' strakh i instinkt samosokhraneniia': Dokladnie zapiski sekretaria TsK KP(b)B P. Nl. Ponomarenko I. V. Stalinu, 1940–1942 gg." [Only an authoritative commander can manage to overcome fear and the instinct for self-preservation': report notes of the secretary of the C[entral] C[ommittee] C[ommunist] P[arty] (b[olsheviks]) B[elorussia] P. N. Ponomarenko to I. V. Stalin, 1940–1942], *Istoricheskii arkhiv* [Historical archive], no. 6 (2004). Original in Russian.
  47. Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Revival in the Russian Village after Collectivization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 314.
  48. Nikolai I. Obryn'ba, *Red Partisan: The Memoirs of a Soviet Resistance Fighter on the Eastern Front*, trans. Vladimir Krupnik (Barnsley, UK: Pen & Sword Military, 2006), 19.
  49. Anthony Beevor and Luba Vinogradova, eds. and trans., *A Writer at War: Vasily Grossman with the Red Army, 1941–1945* (New York: Pantheon, 2005), 48.
  50. "Postanovlenie gosudarstvennogo komiteta oborony 'ob evakuatsii stolitsy SSSR Moskvu'" ["Resolution of the State Committee of Defense about evacuation of the capital Moscow"], 15 October 1941, in *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovliaet (1941–1945)* [State Committee of Defense resolves (1941–1945)], ed. Iurii Gor'kov (Moscow: Olma Press, 2002), 506. Original in Russian.
  51. Beria, Shcherbakov and Pronin to Stalin and GKO, 8 January 1942, in *Lubianka Stalin*



- i NKVD-NKGB-GUKP "Smersh," 1939–Mart 1946* [The Lubianka, Stalin and the NKVD-NKGB-GUKP "Smersh," 1939–March 1946], ed. Khaustov et al. (Moscow: 2006), 325–26. Original in Russian.
52. "8 October, 1941, Prikaz Narodnogo komissara oborony SSSR No. 0099" [Order of the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR, no. 0099], in Iu. N. Ivanova, *Khrabreishie iz prekrasnykh: Zhenshchiny rossii v voynakh* [The bravest among the most beautiful: women of Russia at war] (Moscow: 2002), 220. Original in Russian.
  53. GKO Order No. 741 ss, 8 October 1941, in M. S. Astakhov et al., eds., *Gosudarstvennyi Komitet Oborony SSSR: Postanovleniia i deiatel'nost' 1941–1945 gg.* [The State Committee of Defense of the USSR: Resolutions and activities in the years 1941–1945] (Moscow: Rosspen, 2015), 1:152. Original in Russian.
  54. The best book-length study is Reina Pennington, *Wings, Women, and War: Soviet Airwomen in World War II Combat* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001), 22–29.
  55. Stalin's wartime appointment diary is in Gor'kov, ed., *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovliet* [The State Committee of Defense resolves], 223–469. Original in Russian.
  56. Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 86.
  57. Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 119.
  58. Paul Edward Strong, "Lotta Svärd, Nachthexen and Blitzmädel: Women in Military Service on the Eastern Front," in *Women in War*, 189.
  59. Bill Yenne, *The White Rose of Stalingrad: The Real-Life Adventure of Lidiya Vladimirovna Litvyak, the Highest-Scoring Female Air Ace of All Time* (Long Island City, NY: Osprey Publishing, 2013).
  60. Karel C. Berkhoff, *Motherland in Danger: Soviet Propaganda during World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 53. A recent history of wartime propaganda does not even mention either Raskova or Litviak. The author writes that "enticing women to pick up arms was and remained taboo, as was the role of the state in enlisting them."
  61. Pennington, *Wings, Women, and War*, 26. Evgeniia Zhigulenko related this anecdote but provided no date, nor does she claim to have been present. Whether Stalin ever met Raskova after the outbreak of war remains an open question.
  62. Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 117.
  63. Marshal G. K. Zhukov, *Vospominaniia i razmyshleniia* [Reminiscences and reflections] (Moscow: 1985), 2: chapter 15. Original in Russian.
  64. War Cabinet Minutes of Meetings between I. V. Stalin and Anthony Eden, December 1942, National Archives, Great Britain, WP(42) 8.
  65. Moskoff, *The Bread of Affliction*, 148–49.
  66. This is the judgment of the editors of a book of documents on the subject. Vilenskii et al., eds., *Deti GULAGA, 1918–1956* [Children of the gulag, 1918–1956] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond 'Demokratiia,' 2002), 569n51. Original in Russian.
  67. "Postanovlenie plenuma TsK VKP (b)" ["Resolution of the Plenum of the C[entral] C[ommittee] of the a[ll-Union] C[ommunist] P[arty] (b[olshevik])"], 31 July 1940, in *1941 god v 2-kh knigakh* [The year 1941 in two volumes], ed. V. P. Naumov et al.: 1:139–43. Original in Russian. In April 1941, a front-page article in *Pravda* called for stricter enforcement of these draconian laws and quoted Stalin himself on the need to maintain "iron discipline . . . in production." *Soviet War News*, 22 April 1942, 1.
  68. One NKVD summary near the end of the war gives a figure of 1,068,800 men. Aleshenskii Spravka, 10 March 1945, in *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga: Konets 1920-kh–pervaia polovina 1950-kh godov* [The history of the Stalinist gulag: the end of the 1920s–the first half of the 1950s], ed. N. Vert et al.: 4:98–101. Original in Russian.
  69. GKO Order no. 1526 ss, 3 April 1942, *Gosudarstvennyi Komitet Oborony SSSR* [The State Committee of Defense of the USSR], 1:273. Original in Russian.
  70. "Postanovlenie GOKO no. 1123ss" [Resolution of the GOKO (State Committee of Defense)], 10 January 1942; and "Postanovlenie GOKO no. 1281 ss" [Resolution of the GOKO no. 1281 ss], 14 February 1942, in *Stalinskie deportatsii, 1928–1953* [Stalinist deportations, 1928–1953] ed. N. L. Pabol' and P. M. Polian (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi fond 'Demokratiia,' 2005), 376–78. Original in Russian.

71. Prikaz Narodnogo komissara oborony Soiuzu SSR No. 0058 [Order of the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR no. 0588], in Iu. N. Ivanova, *Khrabreishie iz prekrasnykh* [The bravest among the most beautiful], 222–23. Original in Russian.
72. Prikaz Narodnogo komissara oborony Soiuzu SSR No. 0276 [Order of the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR no. 0276], in Ivanova, *The Bravest among the Most Beautiful*, 224–26. Original in Russian.
73. Prikaz Narodnogo komissara oborony Soiuzu SSR No. 0284 [Order of the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR no. 0284], in Ivanova, *The Bravest among the Most Beautiful*, 227–28. Original in Russian.
74. Prikaz Narodnogo komissara oborony Soiuzu SSR No. 0296 [Order of the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR no. 0296], in Ivanova, *The Bravest among the Most Beautiful*, 228. Original in Russian.
75. Order no. 2470 ss, in *Gosudarstvennyi Komitet Oborony SSSR: Poslanovleniia i deiatel'nost' 1941–1945 gg.: Annotirovannyi katalog v dvukh tomakh* [The State Committee of Defense of the USSR: resolutions and actions, 1941–1945: annotated catalogue in two volumes], ed. M. S. Astakhova et al. (Moscow: Rosspen, 2015), 1:500. Original in Russian.
76. Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 181–202.
77. Prikaz Narodnogo komissara oborony Soiuzu SSR No. 0902 [Order of the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR, no. 0902], in Ivanova, *The Bravest among the Most Beautiful*, 238. Original in Russian. Prikaz Narodnogo komissara oborony Soiuzu SSR No. 0237 [Order of the People's Commissar of Defense of the USSR no. 0237], in Ivanova, *The Bravest among the Most Beautiful*, 240. Original in Russian.
78. Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 163.
79. Лесина (Друзьякина) Мария Степановна [Mariia Stepanovna Lesina (Druz'iakina)], IRemember, accessed 28 May 2013.
80. Kozlov, VOVE, 270. Original in Russian.
81. Афанасьева Нина Федотовна [Nina Afanas'eva Fedotovna], IRemember, accessed 18 May 2013.
82. Kazimiera J. Cottam, "Soviet Women in Combat in World War II: The Rear Services, Resistance behind Enemy Lines and Military-Political Workers," *International Journal of Women's Studies* 5, no. 4 (1982): 367.
83. G. F. Krivosheev et al., eds., *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses in the Twentieth Century* (London: Greenhill Books, 1997), 90; and Ivanova, *The Bravest among the Most Beautiful*, 170. Original in Russian.
84. Boris Gorbachevsky, *Through the Maelstrom: A Red Army Soldier's War on the Eastern Front, 1942–1945*, ed. and trans. Stuart Britton (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008), 121.
85. Grossman provides a vignette of a group of nurses during the battle. Beevor and Vinogradova, *A Writer at War*, 183.
86. Isaak Kobylanskiy, *From Stalingrad to Pillau: A Red Army Artillery Officer Remembers the Great Patriotic War*, ed. Stuart Britton (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas), 227.
87. Лесина (Друзьякина) Мария Степановна [Mariia Stepanovna Lesina (Druz'iakina)], IRemember, accessed 28 May 2013.
88. Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 72.
89. The mortality figure among Soviet POWs is contested, though the most comprehensive study suggests that from a total of 5.7 million Red Army soldiers captured during the war, 3.3 million died. Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen, 1941–1945* [No comrades: the Wehrmacht and the Soviet prisoners of war, 1941–1945] (Stuttgart, 1991). Original in German. On orders for the mistreatment of female captives, see Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women in the Frontline*, 242.
90. Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 102–3.
91. Kobylanskiy, *From Stalingrad to Pillau*, 227.
92. Хохлова Галина Александровна [Galina Aleksandrovna Khokhlova], IRemember, accessed 17 May 2013.



93. "Natalia Peshkova," IRemember, accessed 6 June 2013.
94. Dmitri Volkogonov, *The Rise and Fall of the Soviet Empire: Political Leaders from Lenin to Gorbachev*, ed. Harold Shukman (London: HarperCollins, 1998), 118; and Aleksandr Iakovlev, "Istoriia i sovremennost': Voina so 'svoiei' armiei" [History and the current day: war with "their own" army], *Grazhdanin* [The Citizen], no. 2 (2003). Original in Russian. How many of these death sentences were carried out is disputed. Military statistician G. F. Krivosheev cites the same number of death sentences, but he writes elsewhere of 135,000 executed soldiers; however, he does not document that reduced number, and historians have generally cited the original, higher figure. Krivosheev, *Rossia i SSSR v voynakh XX veka* [Russia and the wars of the xxth century], 43.
95. Svetlana Alexievich, *Secondhand Time: The Last of the Soviets* (New York: Random House, 2016), 194.
96. GKO Order no. 562ss, 22 August 1941, in *Gosudarstvennyi komitet oborony postanovliaet: 1941–1945, Tsify, dokumenty* [The State Committee of Defense resolves: 1941–1945: figures, documents], ed. Iurii Gor'kov (Moscow: Olma Press, 2002), 505–6. Not all soldiers received or consumed their ration, some trading or selling it to comrades; consequently, binge drinking and alcohol abuse were common problems in the Red Army.
97. Lev Kopelev, *To Be Preserved Forever*, ed. and trans. Anthony Austin (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1977), 30.
98. Gorbachevsky, *Through the Maelstrom*, 93.
99. Kobylyanskiy, *From Stalingrad to Pillau*, 228.
100. Quoted in Engel, "The Womanly Face of War," 146.
101. Афанасьева Нина Федотовна [Nina Afanas'evna Fedotovna], IRemember, accessed 18 May 2013.
102. Kobylyanskiy, *From Stalingrad to Pillau*, 228.
103. *Trotskyism* refers to a Marxist ideology based on the theory of permanent revolution by Leon Trotsky, one of the leading theoreticians of the Russian Bolshevik Party and the Russian Revolution. Trotskyism would become the primary theoretical target of Stalin. Kopelev, *To Be Preserved Forever*, 30–34.
104. Moisei Isaakovich Dorman, "Enough Endurance Trials for a Lifetime," in *Panzer Killers: Anti-Tank Warfare on the Eastern Front*, ed. Artem Drabkin, trans. Stuart Britton (Barnsley, UK: Pen and Sword, 2013), 113–14.
105. Wendy Goldman, "Women, Abortion, and the State, 1917–36," in *Russia's Women: Accommodation, Resistance, Transformation*, ed. Barbara Evans Clements et al. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 245–47. Even before the war, a rubber shortage and consequent absence of contraceptives drove many Soviet women to opt for abortion.
106. Пивоварова (Пудовкина) Ольга Алексеевна [Ol'ga Alekseevna Pivovarova (Pudovkina)], IRemember, accessed 11 September 2018.
107. Степина (Потанина) Вера Васильевна [Vera Vasil'evna Stepina (Potanina)], IRemember, accessed 6 June 2013.
108. Elinor Lipper, *Eleven Years in Soviet Prison Camps* (London: World Affairs Book Club, 1950), 12.
109. Vert, et al., eds., *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga* [The history of the Stalinist gulag], appendix 8, 1:632–37. Original in Russian.
110. Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, MA: President and Fellows, Harvard College, 1995), chapter 2.
111. Krivosheev et al., eds., *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses in the Twentieth Century*, 85.
112. Glantz and House, *When Titans Clashed*, 292.
113. Jews accounted for 1.78 percent of the pre-1939 Soviet population. RAN, 57; and Leonid Smilovitsky, "A Demographic Profile of the Jews of Belorussia from the Pre-War Time to the Post-War Time," *Journal of Genocide Research* 5, no. 1 (2003): 117–29, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520305652>.
114. Markwick and Cardona, *Soviet Women on the Frontline*, 246. Kazimiera Cottam claims

- that the following number of women received combat training in 1942: 6,097 female mortar operators; 4,522 heavy machine gunners; 7,796 light machine gunners; 15,290 submachine gunners; and 40,509 communications specialists. Cottam drew these figures from two Soviet-era publications, which also claim that 102,333 female snipers were trained in that year. Cottam, *Women in War and Resistance*, xx. It is difficult to reconcile such numbers with the fact that wartime sniper schools trained only a total of 1,885 female snipers. Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 163. At any rate, most women trained for combat never made it to the front.
115. "New Soviet Law on Mothers and Children, Marriage and Divorce," *Soviet War News*, no. 907, 12 July 1944.
  116. USHMM, RG-31.026, reel 58, fond 1 opis' 23 delo 2536.
  117. Arsen Djatej and Robert Sarikas, "The Second World War and Soviet Accounting," *Accounting History* 14, nos. 1–2 (2009): 35–54, 52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1032373208098551>.
  118. Krivosheev et al., eds., *Soviet Casualties and Combat Losses in the Twentieth Century*, 85; and Krylova, *Soviet Women in Combat*, 300. Because Krylova gives a number of 120,000 women who experienced combat, this mortality figure seems improbably high. This is one of many subjects concerning the eastern front that require more research. Perhaps women killed in the partisan conflict would in part explain the high number.
  119. Engel, *Women in Russia*, 229. Barbara Alpern Engel writes: "In the postwar period women were expected to be all things to all people and to enjoy it," before concluding with surprising confidence that "women did not regard the division of labor in the home as unjust," though they "drew the line . . . at providing the desired number of children."
  120. Quoted in Pennington, *Wings, Women, and War*, 68.
  121. Boris Bogachev, *For the Motherland, for Stalin: A Red Army Officer's Memoir of the Eastern Front*, trans. Maria Bogacheva (London: C. Hurst, 2017), 280.
  122. *Frontovai*a is the adjective and *frontovichka* the noun for a female frontline veteran. Афанасьева Нина Федотовна [Nina Afanas'eva Fedotovna], IRemember, accessed 18 May 2013.
  123. Alexievich, *The Unwomanly Face of War*, 189.
  124. Quoted in Engel, "The Womanly Face of War," 154.
  125. David M. Glantz, *Stumbling Colossus: The Red Army on the Eve of World War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 99. Roger R. Reese calls the "scale of the expansion . . . mind boggling." Roger R. Reese, *Red Commanders: A Social History of the Soviet Army Officer Corps, 1918–1991* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 136–38.
  126. This consensus view is expressed by the foremost biographer of Hitler, Ian Kershaw, *To Hell and Back: Europe, 1914–1949* (New York: Henry Hold, 2015), 341. The most respected and prolific historian of the Soviet military deploys the same argument. David M. Glantz, *Barbarossa Derailed: The Battle for Smolensk, 10 July–10 September 1941* (Solihull, UK: Helion, 2010), 1:17.
  127. Engel, *Women in Russia*, 209. Barbara Alpern Engel, for instance, claims that the Nazi-Soviet Pact "raised hope of avoiding war." She does not mention the immense Soviet military preparations during this period, nor the fact that mobilization of women into the armed forces was almost entirely neglected.
  128. A milestone two-volume compilation on the social history of the war containing contributions from the most prominent Russian historians of the war years, for instance, includes no chapters on women in the armed services or in the economy. G. N. Sevast'ianov, ed., *Voina i obshchestvo, 1941–1945* [War and society, 1941–1945] (Moscow: Nauka, 2004).